

know, duck hunting, or whatever—they had favorable opinions. As I said, when I was Governor, I had both good and one horrible experience with the NRA.

But my view of this is, I think we all have to realize we don't—none of us claim that any of our positions are absolute and that we can make a perfect world and nobody will ever get hurt, no bad person will ever get ahold of a gun, nothing wrong will ever happen. The people who are coming here to Washington, including many people in this room who have lost members of their families, understand that not every law they're advocating might have saved the particular life of the particular loved one they lost. Their loss got them interested in this, and they began to ask themselves: How can we make a safer country? How can we save more children like my children? How can we save more loved ones like my loved one?

I think, in fairness, the people who oppose them are good people. They really believe, I think—I don't know if they'll say it, but maybe after I'm gone they will—I think they think we have some—we either are weak on enforcement or we have some dark hidden agenda to take guns away from everybody, including lawful gun owners. And they think that would change America forever for the worse.

I don't have that agenda. I have never proposed any such rule. What I've tried to do, I'll say again, is I think that this area of our national life is an area where—to go back to the very first question I was asked—where I think we should not rest until we think we have done everything we can to prevent bad things from happening in the first place.

Every other area of our national life, we first choose prevention. Then if things go haywire, we punish. This should not be the area where we say, "Because we're worried about people doing something someday that's bad, we're not going to have prevention; we'll just start with punishment. But we'll be for education, but we'll start with punishment." That's my whole take on this.

I think we could do a lot more on prevention, make it a lot safer country, and achieve the objectives of the Million Mom March, which is that all these women that are here, they want fewer stories like theirs. That's my own take on this.

So I just wanted to put this into context. I want you all to talk to each other when I leave. I've talked too much here. I learn more when I listen.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Gibson. Mr. President, thank you very much.

The President. Thank you all very much.

Ms. Sawyer. Thanks for letting us stay in the house while you're away. [Laughter]

The President. It's your house, not mine. I'm just passing through. [Laughter]

NOTE: The interview segment of the program, entitled "GMA Live at the White House: Moms & Guns," began at 7 a.m. in the Oval Office. The townhall meeting segment originated from the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to Gov. Bill F. Owens of Colorado; Representative Carolyn McCarthy; news talk show host Charlie Rose; and Wayne LaPierre, executive vice president, National Rifle Association.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Million Mom March Representatives and an Exchange With Reporters in Akron, Ohio

May 12, 2000

The President. Good morning everyone. I have just had the opportunity to meet this fine group of mothers who are leading Ohio's participation in Sunday's Million Mom March for commonsense gun safety laws. I want to thank them for their commitment, their determination, and

their courage. What they are doing is profoundly important.

Like millions of mothers all over America, they are outraged by the senseless acts of gun violence that continue to plague our communities, and they are determined to do something

about it. Every day, nearly a dozen of our children are killed by guns. Twelve families suffer a wound that never heals. What is almost as senseless is the fact that Congress refuses to act on legislation that would prevent many of these shootings.

These moms will be marching in Washington and in more than 60 other cities on Mother's Day to say to Congress, enough is enough. It is unconscionable that over a year after Columbine, over 10 months since they've had a chance to send me meaningful legislation, Congress still refuses to act.

Well, they can ignore my request to move. They can ignore the evidence that commonsense prevention won't cost any law-abiding citizen a gun but will save lives. But this Sunday they will not be able to ignore the fact that the voices of more than a million moms across America will be demanding action.

The great sociologist Margaret Mead once said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." The women who are organizing this march are such a group of thoughtful citizens. They understand they have to be in this for the long haul. They understand that they have a lot of work to do.

But the evidence is on their side. The arguments are with them. And the power is on the other side. The whole story of America is the story of bringing down established walls of power in the face of argument and evidence and passionate commitment to liberty and to the dignity of individuals. That's what the Million Mom March represents. I'm honored to be here with them today, and again, I thank them for what they will be doing in Ohio.

Thank you.

Q. Mr. President, do you think that the march will have the kind of impact that will break this logjam and get some gun control legislation through this Congress?

The President. The honest answer to that is, I don't know. But I think it will have a seminal impact in the nature of this debate because, for a very long time now, large majorities of the American people have been for commonsense prevention legislation that has nothing to do with infringing on the right to keep arms, to bear arms, to hunt, to sport shoot, to keep weapons in self-defense, but has everything to do with keeping guns out of the hands of criminals and children. Notwithstanding the fact that

lopsided majorities of our people favor these specific measures, they don't pass because of the intensity, power, and wealth of the organized opposition to it.

So I think what these folks are saying is, you know, we want to save more lives. We're not trying to take anything away from what those people legally have who disagree with us. But we don't intend to let them take away our chance for prevention and safety anymore. And that is the beginning of the shift in the balance of forces in our society. That's how change always occurs.

So if they stay at this, they will prevail, because the evidence is on their side, the human element is on their side, and because they're not trying to take anything away from the other people. All they're trying to do is to protect our society from criminal acts and from avoidable accidents.

There are lives at stake. I think they will prevail. I hope they will prevail this year. I hope we will be able to prevail upon the leaders of the conference to meet and work again. But even if they don't win this battle, they'll win over the long run, because they are galvanizing public opinion around specific reforms that will make America a better place and will give a lot of kids their lives.

Smith & Wesson/Gun Safety Legislation

Q. Mr. President, a \$300,000 grant was given out to Smith & Wesson to do research on smart gun technology. Aren't some folks who see that as a payoff to that company for signing—what do you see as the status of that—

The President. Well, I think first of all, Smith & Wesson did a good thing in making this agreement. And I think it's very—if you look at what they—what did they agree to do? They agreed to attach child safety locks; they agreed to make internal child safety lock mechanisms on their guns as soon as they could do so technologically, which could not be dismantled by the kids; and to work on smart gun technology, which would enable guns to be fired only by the adults who lawfully own them.

They agreed to—this is perhaps most important in the short run—they agreed to change the way they market and distribute their guns to avoid that relatively small number of dealers who sell a very high percentage of the guns that go to people who use them in crimes. Now, I would think that that would have been well-

received by everybody. But instead, the other gun manufacturers and their allies have subjected Smith & Wesson to withering, withering criticism.

But the answer to your question is no. I don't think it'll be seen as a payoff, because it's nowhere near as much money as it will cost them, given the reaction of the rest of the gun industry to what they're trying to do. And we have to have someone who's in the industry help us with this research; just by the nature of it, it has to be done. And I can assure you, there was never any quid pro quo or discussion of it. This all came up later. We need to have some allies in the gun industry who really do believe that prevention is an important part of a safe future for America.

And I hope that Smith & Wesson will keep all the components of the agreement they made. They have certainly paid an enormous price for doing it. I mean, it's truly been breathtaking to see the reaction against them by the other gun manufacturers and their allies.

Yes, sir?

Q. Mr. President, is there room for any compromise in this legislation? And if so, in what area?

The President. Well, let me give you an example of what I—what we've got before the Congress right now. I think we can work out language on the child trigger locks. I would hope that we could get a big majority for banning the import of large capacity ammunition clips. Surely there is not a constituency for that. There has been absolutely no disruption whatever from our banning of assault weapon. But if you let them import these large capacity ammunition clips, then you can modify existing guns here and turn them into assault weapons.

The hangup—and this is interesting to me—the hangup is that the NRA is basically opposed to doing the background checks at gun shows unless they're insta-checks. Now, Ohio is a big State, with a lot of large cities spread across the State, and then an awful lot of small towns and rural areas. Their argument is, a lot of these gun shows are held on the weekend. You know, if somebody comes in and wants to buy a gun, it's a real hassle to wait 3 days for the background checks. Is there a way to work this out?

Well, here's my theory about it. Everybody who clears the insta-check, let them buy the gun. Seventy percent of the people clear the insta-check in a couple of minutes; 90-plus per-

cent within a day, same day as the gun show occurs. But of the less than 10 percent who don't clear it, their rejection rate, because of a problem in their background, principally, a criminal problem, is 20 times higher than the 90 percent of the people that do clear.

So what we've been unwilling to do so far is to say if we don't clear—see, what the NRA position is, if they don't clear in a day, we ought to give that last 9 percent or 8 percent or however many—they ought to be able to take the guns home, even if they don't clear within a day. And my position is, why would we defend a population that's less than 10 percent of the total, that's more than 20 times likely to have committed a crime and be ineligible to get a gun than the rest of the 90 percent?

So it looks to me like we could work an agreement that covers the rest of the 90 percent, and then on the 9 percent, it seems to me it's quite important to do that. And—you know, let me tell you, that would—even that is a compromise from what would be the optimal, and here's why. Suppose a custody order or a stop order is listed in a domestic dispute that's very violent, on a Friday afternoon. It can't possibly be in anybody's computer yet. If you let the insta-check control that, then a lot of people will get cleared—not a lot, but a small number that could be violent—could be cleared anyway.

So our people, representing our position through Mr. Conyers from Michigan, have, I think, made quite a reasonable proposal. And I'm hoping that we'll keep working on it. I think if we just had to work it out in the House, we could probably do it. But right now, the Senate—where, ironically, where we passed a stronger bill—but Senator Hatch and the Senate conferees are essentially refusing to go forward with us on this.

So—I didn't mean to give you too long and detailed an answer, but you need to know that what's so sad about this is I think we could do the child trigger locks; I think we could do the assault weapons ban. And I think—it seems unbelievable to me that we would be hung up here on this background check at the gun shows in a way that affects less than 10 percent of the gun buyers, but they're 20 times more likely to have a problem in their background. It's very important that everybody understand that. If we could just get focused on

that. I can't believe we couldn't figure out a way to work this out.

Now, there's much bigger opposition to what—the larger legislative goals of the Million Mom March, but I think they're absolutely right. As you know, I favor—for example, I think if somebody buys a handgun, they ought to get a license, like a car license. It ought to be a photo ID license. It ought to show that they passed a background check and that they passed a gun safety check, just like you do when you get a car. That's what I think.

So I'd like to see the short-term goals resolved this year, and I want them to keep on pushing, because there is so much we can do. We can make America the safest big country in the world and still have people out there hunting and sport shooting, even having weapons for protection if they thought they needed them in their homes. But we can't do it without more prevention.

Q. Mr. President, what do you think of polls which suggest that support for gun restrictions are wavering among men, and they tend to be more sympathetic to—

The President. If you read—let me just say this. First, I agree with that. But I think we've got to put it into some perspective.

If you go back and look at the data from the Pew Research survey, they do show that men, particularly men over 55, have been affected by the claims of the NRA and the advertising that the rights of legitimate gun owners are threatened. But they also show that a majority, a significant majority of the people, still respond that we need further gun control measures.

The real problem is whether you talk in general terms about gun control, or whether you talk in specific terms about closing the gun show loophole, banning large capacity ammunition clips, imposing child trigger locks, or licensing

gun owners. If you give people the specifics, there are still 70 percent of the people with us, maybe more.

But the labeling fears—because it scares people. I said the other day to our staff, I said, this is weird. That's why the people who oppose our position, they always want to talk about more gun control and imply that the rights of hunters and sports people are threatened. And they use that label.

But you know, when we talk about the speed limits on automobiles or people having to get a license to drive their cars or laws that require you to use your seat belts or put in the right kind of baskets, child safety restraint seats—you know, all those things are laws. You want to drive a car, and you want to put your child in the car. They're all laws. Nobody talks about car control. And you have a constitutional right to travel, too, you know. The Supreme Court says you've got a constitutional right to travel. No one says car control is threatening our constitutional right to travel.

So I think that what we should do is, instead of having these label wars, we should calm down, lower the rhetoric, and say, what is it that we have proposed? What is it that they are advocating? Would it make us safer? Would it prevent more crimes and more accidental deaths and injuries? Does it infringe the Constitution?

My answer is, look at the facts of what they're advocating. Would it make us a safer country? Absolutely. Would it infringe the Constitution? Absolutely not. Therefore, we ought to do it. I think if we just calm this down and look at the facts, we'll prevail.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:35 a.m. outside the Ohio Army/National Guard Facility.

Opening Remarks at a Roundtable Discussion in Akron on Permanent Normal Trade Relations With China

May 12, 2000

Thank you. First of all, I'd like to thank Congressman Sawyer for inviting me here today, and I thank all of you for joining us. I know

we have people here who have a lot of different views on this China issue, but I think that's important. I think this is a big part of what